

# The English Leaflet

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## VARIED PHASES OF ORAL ENGLISH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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Harvard University

Oral English, for lack of a better term, is largely accepted as a general name for some sort of speech training in the schools. Is there an agreement as to just what is meant by oral English? In some instances the term seems to be limited to oral composition or discussion. What of vocal rendering of literature by reading and reciting? Since this work contributes to the good speaking of good English, as silent reading and literary study contribute to written composition, and since in itself it results in a desirable accomplishment, should it not be regarded as a regular part of oral English? If so, then appreciative or illuminative reading should be a part of oral training for teachers.

The morning session of the joint March meeting is to consider specially the teacher's preparation or the teacher's self-improvement for this oral teaching. President Eliot used to emphasize, in his talks on education, the efficacy of showing how. If we believe in this principle of showing how, and are not alarmed at the idea of teaching by imitation, the teacher of English should be so trained as to serve as a good example in speaking and in oral reading. What is involved in good speaking and in good reading? This question is rather for the meeting than for this brief note. But what, in a word, is the first requisite? What should we aim at first? Perhaps the answer from many would be, clearness of enunciation. And so the teacher might be enjoined to take up the practice, with laborious articulations, of a daily dozen or two of lists of words, such as are often found in books on speech, or

This issue of the *Leaflet* has been edited by Professor Irvah Lester Winter. The arrangement is part of the general plan to secure closer co-operative relations between our Association and the New England Public Speaking and Oral English Conference, of which Professor Winter was the founder.—The Editor.

to repeat innumerable alliterative sentences, expressing non-sense or no-sense. Perhaps the counsel would be to learn the elaborated system and strange alphabet of phonetics, as now being put forward. Enquiry, then, might well be made as to the vocal and the expressional results of teaching speech by these merely mechanical methods—by methods which constantly concentrate the attention upon the physical self—upon the positions and movements of the tongue, lips, jaw, and soft palate. These methods are now in use in some schools. As might be expected in the case of any new enthusiasm, some advocates of phonetics are classing as unscientific, vague, and incompetent, those who cannot or will not adopt the phonetic system as a teaching method.

The claim for phonetics is that it is something definite; it is tangible. There are, and should be, definite, tangible details in all good vocal technique. The more serviceable mechanics of phonetics have, in fact, long been in use by teachers of speech and of singing. They have, however, been made subordinate to spirit and expressional motive, to auditory and aesthetic sense. How far are we now going in crowding out all that has the sensory or aesthetic appeal, for the sake of the scientific, the exactly tangible? The question suggests discussion.

What after all is the tangible? Read in this Leaflet the article by Mr. Coryell. Is there anything more tangible, more definite, than the large results of the experience he relates? Many teachers have had this same experience. They can cherish the memory of it. They have stirred to warmth young hearts. They have loosened the restraints of school desks. They have done some informing in gladsome ways. Many teachers, however, are still putting on the clamps of rigid rule and dry definition. In all subjects alike, they must have the scientifically definite. A young boy now in the vicinity of the writer, is studying advanced English grammar. He is learning strong language—language not in the book—not used in his classroom. In this way he gives flight to that spirit which might, if it “had a chance,” sail to great reaches in the realm of fine literature. There is really little that is permanently tangible, as a result of this study of advanced grammar—except the unlicensed words of the boy.

In the high school at Manchester, New Hampshire, last year, the writer visited a class in oral composition—or what you will. Each boy or girl gave what was called a paragraph—a bit of unified talk on a chosen subject. The teacher



was in her proper place, out of sight. She said little, giving occasionally a suggestion or an estimate. The pupils talked strangely well, just like natural boys and girls, easily poised, simple, genuine; in clear speech, in good language. They appeared strangely happy. They smiled. The teacher was gracious; they were gracious. They all "had a heart." There was no one tangible thing; the big result was tangible,—in the best sense.

These matters are related, are they not, to both pupil and teacher. They suggest how the teacher, by improving the faculty of leading and inspiring, can bring about these happy results in the classroom. They suggest what teachers may do for themselves toward this end. Out here in Cambridge there is a Shakespeare Club, wherein some of the busiest men and women meet once in two weeks and read aloud, sitting, a play, with cuts, having cast parts two weeks ahead. This club has been going for forty years. They have no criticism, but incoming members are often seen to make very notable progress in real reading. Teachers of English might, with friends, form clubs. They could practice between meetings. They could occasionally call in a speech teacher to help—call in the teacher; listen to him; forget him, maybe—but keep right on—for forty years—always, above all things, having a good time. This, of course, in lieu of something more exact, more exacting, more seriously effective.

Now to refer back to the earlier question,—What should be aimed at as the fundamental attainment, that upon which all else depends: it is not accuracy or fineness of enunciation—that, in good time, comes; the aim should be for good tone—pure, round, flexible, mellow, vibrant, soulful tone,—an ideal of tone—so happily touched upon in a later article herein.

### YOUNG HUMANS—GIVE THEM A CHANCE!

HERBERT V. CORYELL

Browne and Nichols School

Tell a teacher to be human. The teacher will smile. Isn't that what he or she has been trying to be, ever since the first lesson? Tell a teacher to remember he's handling human beings. He smiles. That is old stuff. We are filled to the eyebrows with the doctrine of interest. We all believe in it—theoretically. But we don't know how to follow it. Not one of us but is violating the law in a dozen instances

every day, because we are so busy schooling children that we have no time to consider educating them. For after all children are schooled through our preconceptions but educated only through their own enthusiasms. This is so in the matter of poetry as much as in anything else; and it is upon this point that I wish as a repentant sinner to testify.

A number of years ago I decided that I must have my pupils memorize an abundance of fine poetry. It would be good for them to have a store of poetical gems ready to be called forth at any moment to fit any occasion. So I bought a small collection of poems for each boy in my class—a fifth grade—and informed them that each boy should memorize a verse a week. Then we went at it, hammer and tongs. Or rather I went at it, hammer and tongs. The pupils were content to be hammered. No one of them appeared to have any ambition to use the hammer and tongs himself. However, I had lots of energy and enthusiasm. I forced through the work, and I drilled endlessly on the essential elements of vocalization, enunciation, pronunciation, expression, and what not. We kept on the march.

Then one evening I received a call from the father of one of my boys, who gently, patiently, but firmly presented to me the fact that Johnny did not like "Poetry." He wondered if I could not alter my method in some way to make the thing more attractive to Johnny. Now we all know the feeling that rises in our breasts when a mere parent comes to tell us what is wrong with our method of teaching. But in this case I could not give way to this feeling. For the parent in question had at one time been my own teacher of oral English. So I had to listen. But I was grudging. I argued my case persistently. I represented this and I represented that. But he held his ground. There was only one thing I could do—give *his* idea a chance with *his* boy. I wouldn't presume to ruin the schooling of any other boys by departing from my system, but I would take down the bars for the man's own boy: I promised not to force him to memorize anything, but rather to allow him to pick out and read aloud at each lesson period anything that appealed to him. I felt that I was making a great concession. The fact was that I was allowing myself to be started on the road to one of the pleasantest and I think most successful bits of education that has ever intruded upon my path as a schoolmaster. I was about to learn that, if you will treat pupils as young humans when you bring them in contact with poetry,



they will react just as adult humans do. They will pick out the things that they like, and will be stirred by them. They will read them eagerly. They will not care for all good poetry; but they will care, each according to his inner nature, for some good poetry, and they will not turn the cold shoulder of bored recollection to the best poetry of our language. The parent of the boy who hated poetry has told me that from the day following our conference his boy's attitude toward poetry altered steadily and amazingly. I saw the thing myself, though I got only the more formal school room side of it. But the thing that hit me with full force was the way the tone of my class work changed as I gradually loosened up and gave my young humans a chance.

My lesson assignment now is: Bring to the class and be prepared to read aloud a poem chosen from any source, provided you yourself think it is something especially fine. The boys still have their little collection of poems. But in addition as time goes on, one by one the boys begin to appear with new books of poetry, ones that they have discovered at home, or ones that their parents have in desperation bought them, when the demand for "a good poem for next lesson" became too insistent and too hard to satisfy. Before the end of a year we often have a dozen books to choose from. Most of the time the selections that stir the youngsters are the good old familiar things that are to be found in all collections: *Barbara Frietchie*, *Sheridan's Ride*, *Paul Revere's Ride*, *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, etc. But every now and then creeps in something less familiar. I remember the rapt attention given to *The Explorer* by a seventh grade class, and the utter stillness that attended the reading of *The Highwayman* by a young athlete in a sixth grade class.

It is the regular thing now, when each boy has done his share of reading for boys to ask me to read some of their favorites aloud. I have to read *Gunga Din* many times a year, and *Fuzzy Wuzzy*. *Keenan's Charge* always brings a tribute of silence at the end. *The Revenge* is a prime favorite. Often a class elects to learn it co-operatively, to say before the rest of the boys. *Grandmother's Story of Bunker-Hill Battle* is such a favorite that it is always thus treated, with two or three boys competing for each verse. *Horatius* goes the same way, with even more enthusiasm. I have had parents—forced listeners to this oral practice—confide to me

that they could hardly sleep for the unconscious repetition of such lines as:

On Astur's throat Horatius  
Right firmly pressed his heel,  
And thrice and four times tugged amain  
Ere he wrenched out the steel.

Bloody, but stirring! Strong in rhythm, and strong in vigorous action for a good cause. Young humans like it. They like other things poetic too; and they'll travel the road of poetry eagerly with any teacher that will give them a chance.

#### HERE AND THERE

CELINA HILLMAN LEWIS

Brookline High School

Every year when Chic Sale comes to Boston, I, moved by the academic spirit of uniting my pleasure with profit, make a pilgrimage to Keith's to see the impersonator in his travesty on the district school. From his opening "Good morning, dear children" to his closing "That is all for to-day," I sit looking at and listening to what is very familiar to me. As the house rocks with laughter and I rock with it, I am aware that I am watching my own mannerisms—somewhat exaggerated I will allow; that I am reviewing my own vocabulary—more overworked than usual to be sure; and that at each visit I am through pity or fear purging my soul.

Yet in his caricature there is one feature of our profession which Mr. Sale has treated too kindly and that is the voice. Moreover, it is easy to know why, for how could he hope to crystallize in one performance the infinite variety of the school product? Think of the thesis one could write with almost no research!

What treasures he might have for the hearing when under a single roof is housed the whining, the booming, the peevish, the raucous, the thin, the thick, the informatory, and the nasal, ye gods the nasal, with its linked sweetness long drawn out! Many a time and oft teachers in the enthusiasm of doing their duty approach the helpless pupils in much the same way that an American who can speak but one language talks to a foreigner—at the top of the lungs. If either victim fails to understand, the lustier the shouts.

Yes, in a profession which acknowledges the power of the spoken word, its means of presentation becomes more often



than not an instrument of torture. Among those who would make self expression the life project and beauty, the creed, there exists sparse evidence of the desirability of the former or of the existence of the latter. Under a similar handicap a preacher would speak to empty pews and an actor would be without a chance in the world, but teachers hold down their jobs without comment. In this particular they are not going against tradition. The public has long since accepted bad voices as a part of the pedagogical outfit.

The witness for the defense might say that possibly our minds are so filled with the rich jewels of thought that we have forgotten the need for a tasteful setting that will enhance the luster of the pearls and attract the appreciation of the passer-by. What a pity to be so misjudged. Surely our wealth has not made us devoid of imagination. Again it has been suggested that in our busy life we have reached the point of view of the mother of a large family; so long as the children are fed, it doesn't matter much how the food is served. Yet the third blames it to our lack of commercial sense that we neglect to display our wares to the best advantage. When I look at the hats and the cravats at a teachers' convention, I am prone to agree that we are a most unworldly lot.

That a pleasing speaking voice is a great asset, no one can deny. It is an aid to discipline, just as an unpleasant voice is a hindrance. The memory of it is often the lasting impression that a pupil carries from school. I can recall little of the master that introduced me to the glory of English verse except that when he read poetry I could think of nothing but the wind in the pines. Nature intended that the human voice should be an efficient and beautiful outward expression of the soul within, for it is a better revealer of personality than the face and through it the spirit must speak.

Undoubtedly the nervous tension so often attendant upon teaching contracts the throat and the result is the high and harsh tone. A voice rightly placed seldom tires, but the exhaustion of the misused one reacts through the system. Much of the error lies in the lack of attention to the condition. There is a necessity for a voice consciousness as it were.

Ellen Terry said "infinite pains" was the only rule she could give. Kate Ryan made "Never let your voice slip" the foundation of all drill.

I have heard people bemoan the fact that they had in-

herited a poor voice and nothing could be done. There are such circumstances, of course, but before the unfortunates yield to despair let me say that I once knew a most worthy and estimable man who when someone asked him why he did not have his child's teeth straightened said that God had made them that way and it wasn't his business to interfere in the design of the Almighty even though He had done rather poorly. However, his offspring either less pious or laying the disfigurement nearer home than the throne of Heaven, chose to defy Providence. On coming to the age when she could do her own deciding, she sought the advice of an expert and after much suffering brought about a result that was the admiration of the beholders.

### IDEALIZING VOICE TONES

CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS

Harvard University

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The poor voice so prevalent among teachers and pupils is due in large measure to a lack of idealism. Provided we give any thought to the matter at all, most of us accept the quality of our speaking tones with the same passive resignation that we accept the color of our eyes or the shape of our ears.

It is, of course, needless to assert that we are wholly independent of nature and nature's bias. Doubtless, the first querulous cry of our infant days reflected a certain native individuality in pitch and tone. But when we began to talk how many of us were subjected to any real tutelage except of that type which contented itself with the pronunciation of the word?

Our instruction in handwriting is an interesting contrast. There we were presented with a concrete example carefully executed by an expert. My mind reverts to those early days in the first primary where all the letters of the alphabet, formed with most meticulous care, adorned the upper portion of the blackboard. Later came the copy books. I used to marvel at the skill displayed by that Spencerian artist whose results stood out in constant protest against my poor attempt to copy the design.

But these models created my ideals and beckoned me forward. They were a constant objective guide of whose visible presence I was always aware. They formed my handwriting—pathetically unlike the models, to be sure, but revealing a forward reach toward perfection.



The schools have developed nothing in voice training at all comparable to this technique in teaching penmanship. There has been little attention paid to the creation of an ideal voice tone. Both teachers and parents have remained grossly insensible of their own defects and of the necessity of providing auditory models that would encourage a child to erect his own ideal of speech tone.

My present brief plea is twofold. First, as English teachers we should each construct for ourselves such an ideal. Second, we should study the means and methods whereby the auditory standard of perfected voice quality is clearly perceived by each pupil—as clearly perceived as is the goal of attainment in penmanship. The value of nature's gift may thus be enhanced; or nature's handicap may in part be overcome.

### THE NEXT STEPS IN ORAL COMPOSITION

SAMUEL THURBER

Newton High Schools

The Oral Composition fever now for ten years has swept through the high schools of America. It seems to have begun as a reaction against the excessive teaching of formal rhetoric,—and daily written themes. It was fostered by the discovery, which dawned slowly upon teachers of English, that men and women are all destined to talk infinitely more than write. It came also as a welcome stimulant to that elusive spirit among boys and girls known as "interest." It answered the popular demand for democratic discussion and self-expression. It seemed to many teachers, weary from themes and struggling with form and accuracy, like a torch that lighted the way to freedom and fewer papers and less red ink.

Of course, the thing has been overdone. It was not destined to be the finish of all our ills. Yet Oral Composition has brought its benefits. It has loosened and widened the minds of our pupils; it has enlivened and humanized our classrooms; it has brought about a saner balance between the talk of teachers and the talk of students; and now at last it is bringing us to a serious consideration of vocal expression and the improvement of speech. And it is high time. For if there is one thing of which we in the English teaching profession ought to be ashamed it is our persistent neglect of the whole subject of voice training.

What is the next step, then, in Oral Composition? First,

we must have teachers who can speak and read clearly, pleasantly, forcefully. By every sort of legitimate pressure English teachers must be urged to improve their voices by taking courses in vocal expression and by striving in every possible way to make more effective their daily classroom speech. Strange as it may seem, English teachers today, as a rule, prefer to spend their time and their money on Saturday and Summer Courses in literature, in written composition, or in educational theory and method. Such courses, however excellent, seldom can function so easily or so quickly as can work in voice improvement. For an opportunity to interpret literature by reading aloud comes almost every day. In fact, I have never found a teacher of English who did not agree with the statement that her teaching efficiency would be vastly increased if she could use her voice more pleasantly, more soulfully, and more freely.

Why, then, do so few teachers undertake seriously the study of their own voices, and of ways to improve them? In the first place, there are lamentably few good opportunities for such study. Much of what is called "voice culture" is declamatory, platform stuff,—only a little better than the old-time elocution,—entirely unsuited to the needs of modern classroom conversation and reading. Ten admirable courses in pedagogy are offered English teachers of Greater Boston to one in vocal expression that is really worth while. In the second place, we are unfortunately sensitive about this thing—our voice. We seem to feel that it is too closely interwoven with our personality, our character, our culture, to be exposed and chastened. It is quite possible that deep down in our hearts most of us think we use our voices pretty well. At any rate, they please us, and it is excruciatingly painful to be disillusioned. Unless we are willing, however, to learn the truth,—to hear ourselves as others hear us—we are lost.

Our second step in this matter of oral composition is to tackle the problem of voice improvement with our pupils. We need "vocal clinics" in our secondary schools just as much as in our colleges. The time must come when every student upon entering high school will have his speaking voice tested by an expert. If he is afflicted with nasal tones, or thin scran-nel pipings, or mouthy thick rumblings, he will be placed in a special class of "voice deficient," and there he will remain under proper teaching until he has improved his speech. If he is caught at a still earlier period in his life, so much the



better. There will then probably be no need of such a "vocal clinic" in the secondary school.

To summarize, we need:

(1) A sounder judgment by teachers of their own voices, and a less sensitive attitude toward their own vocal deficiencies.

(2) More and better opportunities for teachers to study the improvement of their voices.

(3) Higher standards of speech for all secondary school teachers, and especially teachers of English.

(4) Serious and careful study of vocal problems among our younger students, with voice clinics and special classes for those in need of voice training.

#### WHAT CAN THE TEACHER OF ORAL ENGLISH DO TOWARD THE CORRECTION OF SPEECH DEFECTS?

By Professor Daniel W. Redmond, College of the City of New York\*

To determine what may be done toward the correction of speech defects, we must determine what a defect is. That implies that we must define the opposite of a defect—a standard. According to Professor Krapp, the standard of speech may be defined negatively "as the speech which is least likely to attract attention to itself as being peculiar to any class or locality."

*All those peculiarities which make speech repelling or unintelligible are defects.* The sooner we come to regard speech as the product of mechanical skill, the sooner we shall understand that defects are due to the incorrect use of the machinery of speech.

Defects of speech must be identified and classified. It is not enough to say to the student "there is 'something' wrong with your speech." He will reply "Just what is it to which you object and what am I to do about it?" Such remarks prove that the student does not hear his own speech variations. There is no such thing as a natural method of learning a second language. There will be some points at which the set habits used in the first language will not serve to produce correctly all sounds of the second.

For our purposes Speech Defects may be divided into three classes: defects of quality, volume, or pitch; defects in the

\* Adapted from Professor Redmond's article in the English Bulletin of the New York State Association of Teachers of English, Vol. III, Number 1.

production of the individual sounds or words, and substitution of one sound for another; functional disorders such as stammering or stuttering.

As to the first class, it is enough to quote Dr. Muckey: "The fact that every normal mechanism is capable of producing great volume, beautiful quality, and a wide range of pitch if properly used, and that there are so few who even approximate this condition, proves that we do not yet appreciate what are the capabilities of the vocal mechanism."

It is needless to say that the average teacher of English can hardly find time to correct all defects. Much may be done to improve quality and remove nasality by the application of the principles discussed in Chapter I of Palmer and Sammis' *Principles of Oral English* and in Chapter I of *The Voice* by W. A. Aiken.

The second class of defects offers a much more fruitful field for successful effort. These defects are summed up under the general name dialect or brogue. Many students will give up all such errors in a surprisingly short time, provided sufficiently strong pressure can be brought to bear upon them. I have known students to correct all objectionable sounds in only three lessons.

The latest census reports that there are in New York State 2,786,112 persons of foreign birth, most of them speaking some other language than English as a first language. A canvass of a recently admitted freshman class in our own college showed that seventy-five per cent of them use English as a second language.

Our problem, like that of every teacher of English, has been to point out to each student individual errors and to aid in their correction. The very fact that the student still has the errors shows that he does not hear his own error, or hearing it does not know what to do about it. The student must be shown how each sound is made and in what way he differs from the best method. He must then be encouraged and compelled to form a new correct habit in the place of the old incorrect one.

Finally we come to the third class of defects commonly summed up under the names stammering and stuttering. They require the combined efforts of a physician with a good knowledge of speech mechanism and speech psychology and a specially trained teacher. In general these are not cases for the teacher of English or Public Speaking.



## THE MARCH MEETING

The spring meeting of the Association to be held in Boston on Saturday, March 10th, will be a joint meeting with the New England Public Speaking and Oral English Conference.

In the morning Professor Colletter of Simmons College will preside over a discussion of the general field of proper speaking and reading in their relation to teachers of English. After his opening address, half a dozen persons distinguished in this field will make five-minute speeches on the topic, "In what way is our speech defective, and how can it be improved? Can we, for example, set up a speech-clinic in Boston?"

After the morning session there will be a luncheon (\$1.50 a plate) at The Brunswick—and the afternoon proceedings will be held over the "walnuts and the wine." The topic is "The Drama in Schools." Professor George P. Baker has consented to speak to us, and we are also to have another interesting guest, Mr. Percival Chubb of St. Louis.

Members of the New England Association of Teachers of English are reminded that the annual dues (\$1.00) are payable to Mr. A. B. de Mille. These may be paid at the meeting or sent to Mr. de Mille at Winthrop Highlands, Massachusetts.

K. G. T. WEBSTER.

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